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SUBJECT: LUKASHENKO'S NEW GOVERNMENT

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: President Aleksandr Lukashenko has formed a new government with a more streamlined organization and new directives relating to information media, energy, housing, construction, and trade. New cabinet appointments included a new deputy prime minister and five new ministers: energy, information and information technology (IT), labor and social protection, health, and architecture and construction. END SUMMARY.

New Appointments

¶2. (U) On May 5 President Lukashenko signed ordinance no. 290 to form a new government. New cabinet appointments to the government include: Viktor Burya as Deputy Prime Minister; Aleksandr Ozerets as Minister of Energy; Nikolai Pantelei as Minister of Information and IT; Vladmiir Potupchik as Minister of Labor and Social Protection; Vasily Zharko as Minister of Health; and Aleksandr Seleznev as Minister of Architecture and Construction. Incumbents will remain in all other cabinet posts. (See paragraphs 8 through 13 for biographical information on the new appointments.)

New Directives to Cabinet

¶3. (U) Meanwhile, President Lukashenko and Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky issued new directives to the ministries. On May 5, during the president's first meeting with his new cabinet, Lukashenko demanded that the government improve the quality of Belarusian newspapers, magazines, and broadcast programs. He criticized the media for lacking the careful analysis and an ideological pivot necessary to counteract foreign information pressure. Lukashenko was quoted, "State printing plants and publishing companies publish all that flows in."

¶4. (U) Lukashenko directed the new energy minister, Aleksandr Ozerets, to upgrade Belarus' power generation system, raise energy efficiency, and increase consumption of local energy resources as part of an overall modernization program through the year 2010. The next day, Sidorsky directed the energy ministry to formulate proposals for development of Russian natural gas fields by Belarusian companies.

¶5. (U) Regarding housing and construction, Lukashenko noted that more than 50 percent of all complaints received by the government relate to housing management. He directed the housing ministry to cut costs and improve services. Lukashenko also criticized the construction ministry for shortages in cement and break stone and for failing to

develop building materials companies. He ordered more investment and innovation aimed at increasing domestic output of cement and other building materials.

¶ 6. (U) In an effort to boost Belarus' foreign trade, Lukashenko ordered the new ministers to revamp the system of purchasing imported raw sugar which he claimed cost the state at least USD 60 million. He also ordered the head of the Belarusian State Petrochemical Concern (Belneftekhim) to learn to how to sell Belarusian petrochemical products directly to consumers without middlemen distributors. He proposed modernizing petrochemical enterprises, particularly the artificial fiber plants in Mogilev and Svetlogorsk in Gomel region.

¶ 7. (U) These new appointments and directives coincided with an organizational restructuring designed to streamline government. This restructuring includes transforming the three-level government to two levels and reducing the number of agencies from 47 to 39.

Biographical Information

¶ 8. (U) The new Deputy Prime Minister, Viktor Burya, served as deputy head of Minsk city government from 2004 to 2006, head of the Oktyabrsky district administration from 2000 to 2004, first deputy head of the Oktyabrsky district administration from 1998 to 2000, and deputy director general for construction at the electronic enterprise Integral from 1996 to 1998. He was trained as a construction engineer at the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute, 1970-1975. Burya was born on June 8, 1953 in the town of Pestovo in Russia's Novgorod region.

¶ 9. (U) Aleksandr Vladimirovich Ozerets replaces Aleksandr Ageyev as Minister of Energy. Mr. Ozerets most recently served as general director of Vitebskenergo, a subsidiary of

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the state-run power generation and distribution company Belenergo in the Vitebsk region, for which he has worked since 1976. He graduated from the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute in 1976 and the Management Academy of the BSSR Council of Ministers in 1993. Mr. Ozerets was born on May 9, 1953 in the village of Gorbatshevichi.

¶ 10. (U) Nikolai Petrovich Pantelei replaces Vladimir Potupchik as Minister for Information and Information Technology. Mr. Pantelei served as First Deputy of the President of the Minsk City Executive Committee, 2005, Head of Administration of Oktyabrsky Region of Minsk, 2004-2005, First Deputy Head of Administration of Leninsky Region of Minsk, 2003-2004, and director of the Minsk Electric and Mechanical Factory, 1994-2003. He graduated from the Minsk Radio-Technical Institute in 1975. Pantelei was born in 1953 in the village of Kostyuki.

¶ 11. (U) Vladimir Nikolaevich Potupchik replaces Antonina Morova as Minister Labor and Social Protection. In 2004, Mr. Potupchik was named Assistant to the President of the Republic of Belarus and Main Inspector of the City of Minsk. From 2001 to 2004, he served as Deputy President of the Executive Committee of Gomel Region. From 1998 to 2001, Mr. Potupchik served as the President of the Committee for Economics and Market Relations of the Executive Committee of Gomel Region. He graduated from the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute in 1980 and the Russian Academy of Governmental Service of the President of the Russian Federation in 2002. Mr. Potupchik was born in 1958 in the city of Svetlogorsk.

¶ 12. (U) Aleksandr Ilich Seleznev replaces Gennadi Kurochki as Minister of Architecture and Construction. In 2001, Mr. Seleznev was named a director of an organ of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. From 1998 to 2001 he served as Deputy to the President of Executive Committee of

Mogilev Region. Between 1989 and 1998 he worked in engineering and administrative positions in the system for village construction. He graduated from Novopolotskyi Polytechnic Institute. Mr. Seleznev was born in 1956 in Tukolski Zharkovski Region of Kalinsky Region of Russia.

¶13. (U) Vasily Ivanovich Zharko replaces Viktor Rudenko as Minister of Health. Mr. Zharko was named General Secretary of the Belarusian Red Cross in 2005. He previously served as general director of "Belprofsoyuzkurort," 2003-2005, and Deputy Chief Physician of the Brest Regional Children's Hospital, 2002-2003. Mr. Zharko graduated the Minsk State Medical Institute in 1984.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: Since most incumbent ministers will remain in their posts, Lukashenko's "new government" is little more than a minor reshuffling of the old government. Lukashenko's flurry of new directives appears at odds with his earlier claims that he would devolve more policymaking authority to the government. Moreover, his statements underscore his Soviet-style approach and lack of understanding of market forces. In any case, it is interesting to note that Lukashenko has yet to name Anatoly Tozik's replacement as head of the State Control Committee.

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